

**National Convocation Board of Trustees Report
Merger Staff – Director of Christian Education**

Thank you for opportunity to serve as Merger Staff for the National Convocation. This was a full and busy year with life lessons.

Ministry: Travel: Travel included Samuel Proctor Clergy and Lay Leadership Conference, Black Ministers Retreat, Travel included North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee for seminar on King and Civil Rights Movement. Keynoted at Kentucky Women’s Regional Gathering, Alabama/Northwest Florida Regional Convocation.

Black Leadership Project Grants were received and projects that received grants included providing counseling and spiritual direction for African American clergy, educational programs and support for community and support for travel. Studies and resources were written for seasons. Member of planning team for 2019 General Assembly Educational Tracks.

The 25th Biennial Session of the National Convocation was an opportunity for expansion, inspiration and transformation. The Institute for African –American Faith & Life appreciates the intentional prayers, planning and preparation of the workshop presenters. Our soul and spirit expansion opened up with our Pre-Event Lay and Clergy Leadership Institute. Lay leadership was strengthened by workshops on ministry call, congregational transformation, models for ministry and in depth history of the African American Disciples Presence. The Clergy Institute, facilitated by Dr. William Lee, featured the wisdom of Dr. Clarence Newsome and Rev. Denise Bell. After the official opening of the Biennial Session, the workshops continued on Friday and Saturday.

Graduation: This May I received my Masters of Divinity from Christian Theological Seminary. This was culmination of a three year journey of full time work, classes and CPE. I am thankful for the Board’s support and grace during this journey. There are those on this Board who have literally known me long before I ever thought of ministry and spoke life to me decades ago. I am grateful. I walked across the stage with the community that supported me. Thank You.

Sabbatical: This year I was blessed to experience my second Sabbatical from August 24th – December 2nd, 2018. This three month gift is offered by DHM for program staff every five years. It was timely for me, coming after last semester of seminary and the Biennial Session. The theme for Sabbatical was Reclaiming My Time with God, Myself, Rest and Relationships. I am learning that I don’t need to have a to do list, I can just be. Not having a fully pre-planned sabbatical **allowed space for many days with zero agenda**, spontaneous surprises and opportunities. I intentionally didn’t share or post everything, so I could be completely present and treasure those moments and people.

There are highlights: It began with reminder of who I am and where I come from. I journeyed to the Monte Verdi Plantation in Rusk, TX where my ancestors did INVOLUNTARY labor in the 1850's and 1860's I was angry that they had to endure it and overwhelmed by the strength and perseverance that got them through it. We honored them with the unveiling of a Texas

Historical Marker, placed on the estate with our ancestors names engraved. After freedom, in 1865 My ancestors created their own surnames so that their descendants would have a new beginning. They built their own school and church - Anadarko Christian Church, where my father grew up and accepted Christ. Their spirit called us to the place that once had them bound, but not broken. They called us to remember the power of telling our story and gathering together as family.

I also had time to attend conferences that bring me joy and give me life:

National Association of Black Storytellers Conference – Cary, North Carolina – I FOUND MY TRIBE.

Women in Ministry Conference – Atlanta, Ga. – Sitting and being refreshed by Pastor Hale and Women In Ministry.

Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) – Indianapolis Sabbatical ended with journey to Barcelona and Madrid, Spain and the chance to speak in another language and to explore and rest.

My goal is to keep sabbatical practices as a regular part of my life and rhythm. I continue to ask for prayers and accountability in that area. I always continue to seek out resources and developing relationships. These relationships have birthed writers, grant recipients, conference/workshop leaders and most of all, some deep abiding friendships.

Blessed to be a blessing to you,

Minister Sheila P Spencer

Merger Staff – Director of Christian Education/Faith Formation
Dean The Institute For African –American Faith & Life